

## Head Lice

Head lice, or *Pediculus humanus capitis*, are parasitic insects that feed on human blood and live on the scalp but may also be found on the eyebrows and eyelashes. They often spread to the bedding or clothing of an infested person. Head lice infestations are treated with over-the-counter and prescription medications.

### Symptoms of head lice

The most common sign of head lice is an itchy scalp or neck caused by an allergic reaction to lice bites. Other symptoms include:

- a tickling or crawling sensation on the scalp or in the hair.
- irritability and sleeplessness.
- sores on the scalp caused by scratching, which may become infected.

People experiencing head lice for the first time might not itch for 4-6 weeks, and the itching may be mild or absent when only a few lice are present. Anyone with lice may see them crawling in their hair or eggs (nits) stuck to hair shafts, especially behind the ears and at the base of the neck.



### How head lice spread

Head lice spread mainly through direct head-to-head contact with someone who has lice.

Lice crawl and cannot hop or fly, so this contact is the most common way they spread. They can live on a person's head for about 30 days and multiply quickly. Having head lice is not related to personal hygiene or home cleanliness.

### Preventing head lice

- Avoid head-to-head (or hair-to-hair) contact during play and other activities.
- Do not share combs, brushes, towels, hats, scarves, coats, sports uniforms or hair accessories.

### Treating head lice

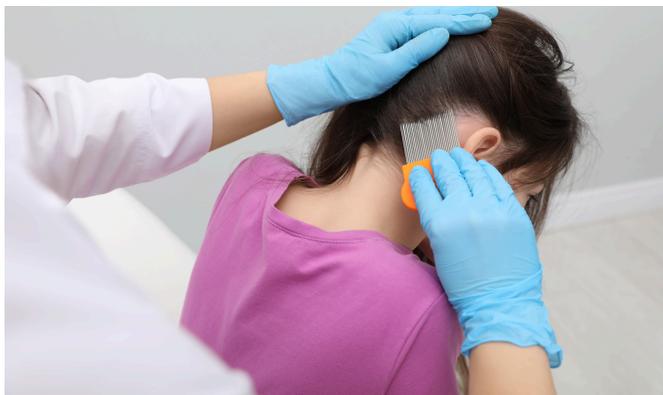
Once someone is confirmed to have head lice, **check all other household members and close contacts.** Treat all infested persons and people they share a bed with at the same time. Pets do not need to be treated, as they do not get or spread head lice.

**Treat lice with over-the-counter or prescription shampoos and other medications.** Follow all provided instructions when using lice medication. Medications are generally safe and effective when used correctly. Some medications may cause itching or a mild burning sensation. Use all medications as directed. Additional treatments are often necessary. Talk to a healthcare provider about treatment recommendations.



## Safety considerations for lice treatment

- An adult should apply the medicine.
- Do not put a plastic bag over the person's medicated hair.
- Children should not be left alone while medicine is being used.
- Rinse the medicine out over a sink with warm water. Do not rinse it in the shower or bath, and avoid getting it on other parts of the body.
- Keep the medicine in a locked cabinet where children cannot reach it.
- Talk to a doctor before using the treatment a second or third time.
- Wash clothing, towels, hats and bed linens in hot water and dry them on high heat if they were used within the two days before head lice were discovered and treated.



## How to check for head lice

- Seat the person in a brightly lit room.
- Part their hair into sections.
- Look for crawling lice and nits on the scalp, neck and behind the ears.
- Use a fine-tooth comb (such as a louse/nit comb) to help you search the scalp section by section.

## Controlling outbreaks

Head lice are most common in preschool- and elementary school-aged children. **Regular checks for head lice are a good way to spot head lice before they have time to multiply.**

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that schools provide education and resources to families so they can better understand and manage head lice at home and in the community.

## Additional resources

- **Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC):**  
[cdc.gov/lice/about/head-lice.html](https://www.cdc.gov/lice/about/head-lice.html)
- **The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):** [bit.ly/AAPLice](https://bit.ly/AAPLice)